

Nadler Introduces High-Risk Non-Profit Security Enhancement Act

Wednesday, 31 March 2004

Washington, DC -- Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today introduced the High-Risk Non-Profit Security Enhancement Act, legislation that will provide federal funding to help non-profit organizations take security measures to defend themselves from potential terrorist attacks. At a press conference with other members of Congress and representatives of non-profit organizations including the United Jewish Communities, the Orthodox Union, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the American Jewish Congress, the American Red Cross, the National Assembly of Health and Human Services Organizations, the American Hospital Association, YMCA of the USA, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Theatre Communications Group, the United Way, Art Museum Directors, and Symphonies, Nadler made the following statement:

I want to thank my colleagues and United Jewish Communities for their work in drafting this legislation, and I am pleased to sponsor it in the House. The High-Risk Non-Profit Security Enhancement Act should be adopted immediately to protect schools, places of worship, and other "soft targets," which, as stated recently by CIA Director George Tenet, al Qaeda is increasingly focused.

The United States has an obligation to protect organizations that are potential targets of terrorism. Recent bombings of synagogues in Istanbul and Casablanca show that the terrorist threat continues to be very real. We must provide the means to help non-profit organizations defend themselves from potential attacks by those who espouse hate and violence.

In my own district, Mayor Bloomberg and police officials have made the very wise decision to take steps in protecting non-profit organizations that may be potential targets for terrorists. Recent threats made by Hamas and al Qaeda are being taken very seriously. To defend potential targets against this threat, the Mayor and New York City police are deploying foot patrols and armed units to keep watch over high-risk non-profits. This defensive action is necessary and smart, and there is absolutely no reason why the nation as a whole should not follow suit.

The High-Risk Non-Profit Security Enhancement Act would authorize the Secretary of Homeland Security to provide up to \$100 million in security assistance in Fiscal Year 2005 to 501(c)(3) organizations that are at risk of being attacked by terrorists. After funds have been directed to high-risk institutions, federal loan guarantees would be available through a new office in the Department of Homeland Security that will work with vulnerable non-profit organizations.

\$100 million is not a lot to ask, and is in fact a very modest amount when considering the need to properly defend targets against al Qaeda. The funding will be used for security enhancements, as well as technical assistance to assess security needs, develop plans, and train personnel.

As you know, when it comes to the President's faith based initiative, many of us have had some serious disagreements. The legislative battle going on in the Senate right now is a case in point. This is different, and I think that is why you are seeing broader support than you might otherwise expect. Most importantly, this legislation will not provide direct assistance, whether in the form of cash or vouchers, to any religious institution. It breaks no new ground. While the government will have the ability, and the funding, to protect potential targets of international terrorism, it would be the government spending government money to pursue the important public function of protecting Americans from terrorism. The government will set the priorities and select those potential targets that deserve the highest priority of attention. This is no different from police or fire protection for a private institution, whether religious or non-religious.

The threat is real and serious. Communities around the world have been targeted simply because of who they are. Charitable institutions and houses of worship are targets precisely because of what they represent to the terrorists. If the duty of government to protect citizens from terrorism has any meaning, it must include the obligation to protect potential

targets from terrorism.

By accomplishing this critical national security function -- without in any way getting involved with the kind of issues raised by giving federal funds to faith-based institutions -- we have struck an appropriate balance and assured the safety of all Americans.

Again, I thank my colleagues for joining me in introducing this legislation, and I urge the Congress to immediately adopt it. Thank you.

###